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ABSTRACT

Needs, resources, methods, and motivation must be emphasized in personal and professional growth programs if teachers are to continue to develop professionally. Programs should include input by teachers, administrators, and staff development specialists in a spirit of mutual development of professional skills and, when possible, should be built into the educational day. Periodically providing substitutes to allow released time for growth opportunities seems a helpful development used by some school systems. Teachers must be able to anticipate that skill development will have a specific payoff in terms of more income or more released time for other activites. A staff development program should begin with individual personal growth opportunities emphasizing values, self-concepts, and potential for growth which can then lead to incorporating cognitive materials into a self-directed program of positive behavior change. This will help educators see themselves as changing, growing persons who can shape the outcome of that growth and can recognize their shortcomings as targets for growth rather than as sources of defensiveness. (TJ)

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SETTING PARAMETERS FOR PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

by

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SETTING PARAMETERS FOR PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

Setting parameters for professional growth is one of the most critical tasks facing the educational system. Educational resources seem to be dwindling year by year, and educational problems are multiplying. Educational needs have always existed, but they are being identified in rapidly increasing numbers. The task of the teacher, while essentially unchanged over several decades, looms ever more challenging. Educational needs are more clearly specified, students are more accurately assessed and profiled, and accountability of both teacher and system are moving closer to the front and center stage.

It is imperative for the success of the student, the performance of the teacher, and the survival of the system, that many things happen to enhance the professional growth of the teacher. No other task should be viewed as more urgent than this in the coming decade.

The parameters for professional growth resemble a complex geometric design. Some facets are more pronounced than others, and each issue is connected to all other issues. The issues which define the parameters of professional growth are many and varied. Some are heavily weighted and some are relatively insignificant. However, we will divide the parameters into four general categories: Needs, resources, methods, and motivation.

Adequate assessment of needs is the first prerequisite for facilitating professional growth. But this assessment of needs is more complex than is generally assumed. It is not sufficient that this assessment come from an administrator. Rather the need must be ascertained by administrators and teachers working jointly for the common good of all concerned.

Assessment of resources is the next vital component. Select administrators frequently know the limitations of statutes and financial resources but fail to communicate the inflexible nature of these limitations to faculty. Therefore, decisions dictated by these limitations may be interpreted as capricious and insensitive. Resolution of this prevailing problem can only be achieved by adequate communication of available resources to the entire professional staff.

Adequate assessment of needs and resources has much bearing on the methods deployed to attain professional growth. Suffice it to say, a large variety of methods are available to all systems, and generally are limited only by the creativity and resourcefulness of the persons in charge.

Teacher motivation for professional growth remains one of the most elusive elements in the whole process. Both the statutes and the available resources eliminate from consideration the normal incentives for professional growth, i.e., increased profit and/or personal freedom. There are, however, available means of motivation that are both legal and financially feasible. Again, the effective utilization of these techniques are contingent upon the ingenuity and creativity of those charged with this

responsibility. As with assessment of needs and resources, teacher input in these decisions will considerably increase the probability of their efficacy.

Regardless of whether staff development is focused on improving instructional or management skills or on providing opportunities for personal growth, it must be viewed as an essential part of the educational procens. Providing attractive, significant opportunities for educators to continue their professional growth is a crucial issue in education today.

One of the prevailing problems in the professional growth of teachers is that too much "good teacher" behavior is administratively assessed in terms of control and boundary maintenance. Static qualities are often assessed more highly than dynamic ones. For example, a good teacher is frequently viewed as the one who has the quiet orderly classroom and gets her paper work completed on time.

Personal and professional growth must be emphasized as an open-ended process. Management by objectives is a valuable administrative tool. However, establishing precise objectives in teacher growth can become a stultifying, mechanical process which inhibits creativity. Attaining advanced degrees, fulfilling requirements for academic credit, and logging in time at professional meetings does not, in itself, enhance the professionalism of the teacher. Staff development programs must help establish, within the profession, a model for excellance rather than just adequacy. The model should be "becoming a better teacher" rather than "being a good teacher" that is now

in use (Furey, 1978).

Historically, teacher education has consisted of a series of courses which comprise a program of study for students aspiring to be teachers. The program of study is developed and provided by the universities and colleges in accordance with state educational association guidelines, with occasional suggestions from public school personnel. Advanced degrees in education are usually earned after teachers have been on the job, and then only to meet employment requirements or to get salary advances. Rarely does one encounter a teacher taking additional courses for the sheer desire for professional improvement. This is attested to by evidence that virtually all continuing education is done within the confines of certification requirements. Advanced degrees among teachers are more a tribute to their perseverance than to their intellectual inquisitiveness or professional commitment.

Staff development usually means workshops within the school district with obligatory or voluntary attendance after school or on a released-time day. At times, these programs focus on a system-wide problem, usually identified by administrators, such as "increasing reading skills." Decisions in staff development are typically made by school administrators for their staff.

Planning staff development programs should include inputs from everyone involved: the participants, teachers, administrators, and staff development specialists. Administrators must feel that they can suggest to teachers areas in which growth is desirable; teachers, in turn, ought to be able to feel free to suggest ways in which administrators might develop plans for their

own educational growth. Shared goal setting and decision-making reinforce the point that both teachers and administrators are educators and colleagues and not part of an employer/employee relationship.

There exists among teachers a vast reservoir of untapped expertise and experience. If they are given the opportunity, good teachers are capable of drawing on these as a starting point for growth. The good practitioner has great potential as the trainer of other teachers. This also provides them with a unique source of professional recognition and personal satisfaction. In programs such as this, teachers can exercise leadership in the profession and share their expertise with colleagues, without having to leave teaching for administrative positions.

There are three reasons for considering the active involvement of teachers in the total development process:

1. Teachers are the principle agents in determining fundamental changes in the education process;
2. Teachers are unlikely to change simply because administrators or outside experts tell them to; and
3. Teachers will take reform most seriously when they are, at least partially, responsible for defining their own educational problems, delineating their own needs, and receiving help on their own terms.

Participation in staff development should be part of the terms of employment for all educators, regardless of what their role may be. Each year educators expect and generally receive, a salary increase based on the assumption that another year on the job has made them better at what they are doing. Mandatory staff development participation would:

1. Make it clear to educators that the normal state of the profession is growth;

2. Push school districts to reasses, on a regular basis, the needs and issues that the staff must deal with and make available the resources to meet these needs; and

3. Make it possible for institutions to invest in programs that would update and improve the staff in pertinent areas rather than relying on randomly selected conferences and professional meetings to provide necessary growth. There are some cases when teachers can virtually survive the length of their professional careers without any formal efforts at professional enhancement.

Educators have come to the conclusion that a uniform presentation of material to a class is not the most effective way to teach children.

"In the absence of a proper tape or filmstrip, I am coming to you 'live'...."

It seems logical, then, that providing for individual differences among teachers and administrators can only facilitate their inservice learning. The growth needs for individuals who are already good teachers are different from those of teachers and administrators who are new to the job or who are simply not as competent as others. Too often concentration on the new or the weak leaves the perso.. who does a good job to find his own

growth experiences. Tying staff development into regular professional evaluation is a way to break the "good teacher" model and to give competent people the opportunity they deserve for developing themselves more fully as people and as professionals.

Everyone will agree that finance factors are crucial. Therefore, it would be irrational to design professional development programs without due concern for budgetary constraints. The question is not merely what is good but also what is economically feasible. It may be necessary to first conceptualize an ideal arrangement, however elegant and costly, but sooner or later, we will have to generate mechanisms that are serviceable as well as inexpensive.

"We're cutting costs without sacrificing quality... we hope..."

Staff development programs operate in two areas. The first centers on providing new approaches, new skills, and new curriculum materials to the classroom teachers as a means to better classroom instruction, and hopefully, more classroom learning. This covers knowledge and techniques. The second area focuses on providing experiences for personal growth and self-awareness. It is a shaping of attitude and purpose.

There are numerous options to choose from in the first area. The problem is, however, that exposure to new approaches to teaching and supervision are of little use if teaching in the classroom and supervision of the teaching remain exactly as before. No amount of curriculum workshops will bring about improvement unless teachers who will be using the new materials and administrators who will be supervising them are willing to move from "business as usual" attitudes and grow into new roles. Unless educators can accept themselves as persons who can initiate and direct change instead of maintenance personnel who respond to pressure, no amount of educational innovation, no matter how well conceived or cleverly marketed, can make real differences in learning for children.

Leadership, or the absence of leadership, works in strange ways. Principals, as experiments have demonstrated, have considerable impact on the operation of schools, both through calculated actions and through deliberate failure to act. Much depends upon teachers' perceptions of a principal's educational philosophy and on the extent to which they trust executive judgment, feel supported, and are thus inclined to aid and abet the cause. Leadership behavior is often less significant than the motives followers ascribe to the behavior. Well-intentioned administrators, seeking to accomplish worthwhile goals, may be forgiven and aided when they blunder. On the other hand, when their actions and aspirations are viewed by the faculty with either suspicion or disdain, loyalty, trust and commitment are substantially reduced. It is largely for these reasons that the

brightest and best educated of principals are not always the most successful: faculty response to administrative maneuver has the capacity both to blunt genius and enhance ordinary leadership ability (Smith, 1978). The principal is without question the key figure in the success of any inservice program within a school. The administrator's expectations for the use of that time must clearly indicate that productivity and professional growth are desired outcomes.

If we are really serious about our quest for quality education, then we must also get serious about designing opportunities for teacher growth into the educational day. Not even the most naive person would accept the notion that once a person has completed a program of teacher preparation, he or she would be sufficiently equipped for the duration of a career. The willingness to provide time for inservice is in effect a test of the importance we attach to quality teaching.

Among the issues affecting the professional development of teachers is the concept of the teacher as a professional versus the concept of the teacher as a paid employee of a complex, beaurocratic organization. A fully professional person expects to invest unpaid time in development of personal and professional skills. In return, he expects that the development of these skills will have a specific payoff in the performance of his profession. He can reasonably expect that it will provide more income, more released time for other activities, etc. The teacher, while generally pressing for recognition as a true professional, cannot generally expect any of the normal

professional rewards for professional excellence. Generally speaking, the teacher will not receive merit pay for superior performance, released time for personal activities, ad infinitum.

When the complex interaction between the concepts of teacher as professional versus employee are viewed, the investment of time becomes one of the most crucial variables. In the absence of merit pay or other tangible rewards, official school sponsored activities for professional growth must either be offered during the paid working time of the teacher, or meaningful incentives for overtime commitments must be offered.

Such standards as paid Saturdays and district-supported summer sessions should be included as options. The best times for effective inservice are planned "professional days" and schedules that permit inservice to become a part of the regular working day.

It is apparent from the testimony of a great many teachers that they have received academic training in education, have received appropriate degrees, but are still uncertain about how to teach reading or any number of specific skills. They have received extensive training in theoretical conceptualization, but have been short-circuited somewhere between theory and practice. When they were receiving training, there were many questions they did not know to ask or wonder about. Greater effectiveness can be achieved on the job if teachers are fresh and can look forward to their training sessions with some anticipation.

Some school districts have a policy of periodically providing substitues for teachers on a rotating basis to

enable them to attend workshops, produce materials, and plan future activities. This provision did a great deal to boost the morale of teachers, and motivate them for participation in the released time plan.

The most limiting factor in planning staff development is our own imaginations and falling into the trap of "this is the way we always do it." One school district in our area operates on the philosophy that the best teacher is one who is well rounded in his development. Every teacher is required to acquire 10 points each year. These points are to be divided into three areas: Personal (cake decorating, cosmetics, etc.), professional (open education, reading enrichment, visitations to other schools, techniques, etc.), and physical (exercise, dance, yoga, etc.). Teachers are given 1 point for every two hours they spend in their individualized programs. This district believes in this enough to turn school out at 2:00 on specified days for staff development activities. This allows the teacher a period from 2:30 to 4:30 for selected activities without changing her workday schedule.

In another school, teaching interns replace career teachers for short periods of time to allow professional development activities. Regular teachers do not go on formal leave, but time is made available through the use of the intern substitutes. Mini-courses are then provided in the school setting by university personnel.

A Title IV-C project in Ft. Worth provides a core of floating teachers who fill in as subs while regular and/or special education teachers spend three weeks at an exemplary training center for children who are emotionally disturbed.

During this period of time the floating teachers are using techiniques the classroom teacher is learning. Hence the class is already being prepared for the implementation of new techniques the teacher has learned.

In Project MARC, a Title III project in Florida, substitutes were hired for a preschool training session and for inservice days scheduled throughout the year. In this case the substitutes participated in the same introduction and review of techniques before the beginning of school and participated in the making of teacher-made materials. Then one and two day workshops were scattered through the school year for a total of seven days. This instigated a lot of positive feedback and teachers who were excited about their new growth and development.

A staff development program, then, should offer opportunities for individual personal growth as well as growth in professional competence. The initial emphasis, however, should lie in the area of personal growth, because the effectiveness of any educational program, whether designed for students or staff, is contingent upon the willingness of an individual to change. What is lacking is a touching of the learner's values, self-concept and potential for growth that could lead to incorporating the cognitive materials of these courses into a self-directed program of positive, personal behavior change. An effective staff development program will help educators see themselves as changing, growing persons who have the opportunity of shaping the outcome of that growth, and who can recognize their shortcomings as a target for growth rather than a source of defensiveness.

The vehicle used in a staff development program to provide personal growth and heighten self-awareness is immaterial. What is important is that educators work together in an atmosphere of mutual concern and respect so that the effect of a comprehensive staff development program can be channeled into behavior that has direct, positive impact on the growth of students in the schools.

> The futurists who serve us best are those who preach an optimistic rather than a pessimistic outlook. Pessimism debilitates psyche and spirit alike. What, after all, will be lost if our faith in the perfectability of humankind eventually proves false? A belief in the capacity of teachers to grow, to reach increasingly higher levels of maturity, and to serve youth with greater compassion, skill, and understanding, is, perhaps what will make the difference(Rubin, 1978, 40).

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